The boarded up Stonewall Inn after the riot the weekend of 28th June, 1969

Queer people could be arrested and charged with a huge variety of crimes. Even a gathering of "homosexuals" alone could be punishable by law as "disorderly behavior".

Activists pushed and won huge success when, in 1966, it became legal to serve homosexuals alcohol. You read that right. Beforehand, it had been illegal to serve homosexuals alcohol in the United States on the basis that it may "encourage their vices".

This action functionally legalized gay bars' existence but did not stop the near-constant harassment of these institutions by police.

Public same-sex PDA was still illegal.

How was that defined? It was up to the officer's discretion. This meant that any queer person could be arrested (with violence) at any time, and jailed, based fully on the whims of police officers.

Additionally, many gay bars did not have legal liquor licenses, as many were owned by organized crime groups. The mafia saw an opportunity

queer victoy. There is no conscience about the lashback we face as a result of these victories, or the effects of the long term systematic exclusion (past, present, and future) we face as a result of the blind pursuit for mainstream acceptance.

It doesn't matter how many of us are murdered, go missing, or find ourselves excluded, bashed, or beaten. The band plays on like the single minded machine that it was always meant to be.

Pride Toronto is busy celebrating it's 25th anniversary...
but wait, something is wrong...
something got lost in all the circuit parties
the alcohol laden, inaccessible and ageist spaces

The Dyke March is now the last refuge for those of us looking for the politics that began Pride, well, actually any politics at all!

Since when did we become a tourist attraction? Where is our community? Why is it that many queer people choose to go elsewhere on the day of Pride? What happened to the revolution? Since when did "revolution" become an embarrassing word associated with those unwanted angry types?

THIS IS A TIME FOR REFLECTION!!

When the mainstream throw us a few scraps after long years of hard fought struggles, how do we react? As we morph and grow, and become "accepted", who are we leaving behind? What her/history and identities are we erasing? What principles do we compromise?

As it stands, Pride is now a coopted event, and an epitome of what is happening to the rest of the queer community. It is an event that perpetuates homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, social classism, economic classism, polyphobia, bodyphobia, binary-dominance, sex-negativity, erotophobia, ableism, ageism, anti-sexwork sentiment, systemic exclusion... in short, all of those issues that it was meant to address and fight.

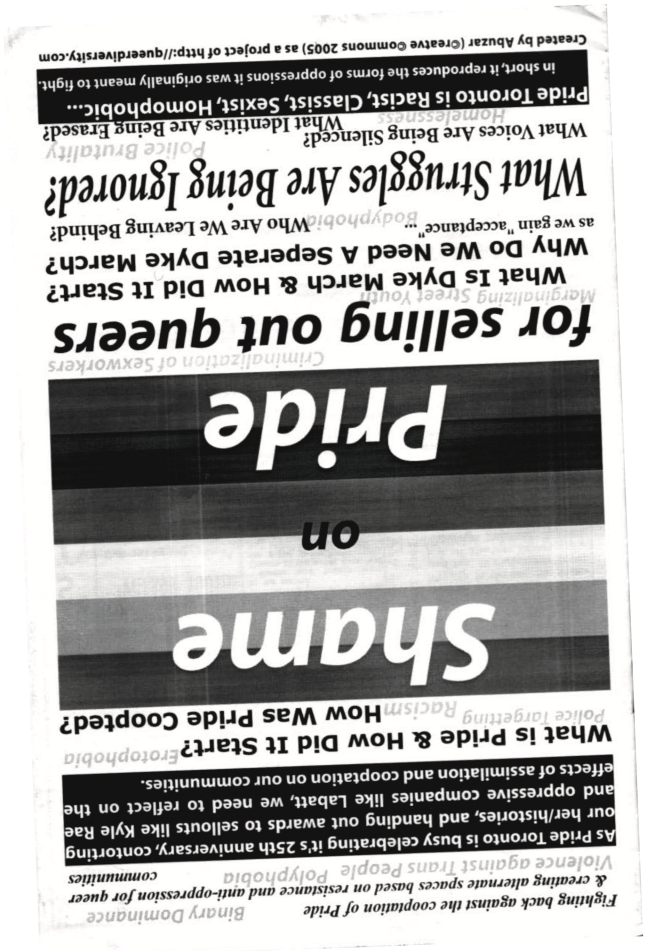
Shame
on
Pride
for selling out queers
What is Dyke March & How Did It Start?
Why Do We Need A Seperate Dyke March?
as we gain "acceptance"... Who Are We Leaving Behind?
What Struggles Are Being Ignored?
What Voices Are Being Silenced?
What Identities Are Being Erased?
Pride Toronto is Racist, Classist, Sexist, Homophobic...
in short, it reproduces the forms of oppressions it was originally meant to fight.
Created by Abuzar (Creative Commons 2005) as a project of http://queerdiversity.com
What is Pride & How Did It Start?
How Was Pride Coopted?
As Pride Toronto is busy celebrating it's 25th anniversary, contorting our her/history, and handing out awards to sellouts like Kyle Rae and oppressive companies like Labatt, we need to reflect on the effects of assimilation and cooptation on our communities.
Fighting back against the cooptation of Pride
& creating alternate spaces based on resistance and anti-oppression for queer communities

Photo from the Stonewall Riots , 1969

lesbians, trans people and anyone else who was in suspicion of cross dressing.

The exact details of June 28th, 1969, have been endlessly debated, however, the general consensus is that the neighborhood, agitated at the lack of warning, hung around outside the bar as 13 arrests were conducted. The arrests were rough, and officers were flagrantly violent towards their captives. Most accounts agree that one officer hit a butch lesbian over the head as he forced her into a police car. She shouted to the crowd to do something, and all hell broke loose.

The crowd had no weapons. Against fully armed police officers, the queer destitute and outcast began to throw objects at the officers. The courage involved in that action alone should stun you.

There are a lot of discussions in the modern day about who, exactly, threw the first brick.

The truth is that whoever threw the "first" brick matters far less than how many people were throwing bricks. The riot at the Stonewall Inn — and the beginning of the queer rights movement as we know it — was a movement of solidarity, not individualism.

The photo below was taken in Times Square a few days after the initial riot, when protests were widespread across New York City. These are some of the original members of the group that would become the Gay Liberation Front.

Stonewall's Transgender Legacy

Transgender History:
Roots of Todays Revolution
Susan Stryker

page 100-102

Within a month of the Stonewall Riots, gay activists inspired by the events in Greenwich Village formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), which modeled itself on radical Third World liberation and anti-imperialist movements. The GLF spread quickly through activist networks in the student and antiwar movements, primarily among white young people of middle-class origin.

Almost as quickly as it formed, however, divisions appeared within the GLF, primarily taking aim at the movement's domination by white men and its perceived marginalization of women, working-class people, people of color, and trans people. People with more liberal, less radical politics soon organized as the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), which aimed to reform laws rather than foment revolution. Many lesbians redirected their energy toward radical feminism and the women's movement. And trans people, after early involvement in the GLF (and being explicitly excluded from the GAA's agenda), quickly came to feel that they did not have a welcome place in the movement they had done much to inspire. As a consequence, they soon formed their own organizations.

In 1970, Sylvia Rivera and another Stonewall regular, Marsha P. Johnson, established STAR—Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. Their primary goal was to help street kids stay out of jail, or get out of jail, and to find food, clothing, and a place to live. They opened STAR House, an overtly politicized version of the "house" culture that already characterized black and Latino queer kinship networks, where dozens of trans youth could count on a free and safe place to sleep.

Rivera and Johnson, as "house mothers," would hustle to pay the rent, while their "children" would scrounge for food. Their goal was to educate and protect the younger people who were coming into the kind of life they themselves led—they even dreamed of establishing a school for kids who'd never learned to read and write because their formal education was interrupted by discrimination and bullying.

Riots happen when desperate, hurting people have nothing left to lose.

The queer community was marginalized and forced into destitution, violence, and abuse by organizations, politicians, and bystanders alike.

The Marsha P. Johnson google doodle is an excellent example of that. In it, Marsha's likeness has been presented as peacefully leading a street parade, with banners of pride flags held by marchers.

Many organizations "celebrating" Stonewall's legacy today sanitize its roots and obscure their own complicity in the conditions that led to an open riot.

In protest, Johnson and Rivera then marched ahead of the beginning of the parade.

Throughout the 1970s, her drag performances heavily influenced the art form, and her protests heavily influenced the progression of queer rights.

She became so well known that in 1975 she was captured by Andy Warhol for his “ladies and gentlemen” series.

"Marsha’s position on Christopher Street is double-edged. A martyr of gay liberation, [she] is denied entrance to many bars. Andy Warhol silkscreens of Marsha sell for $1400 in a Christopher Street gallery while Marsha walks the sidewalk outside, broke." ~ the Village Voice, 1979 *(ctd. on page 41)*

She became a marshal with ACT UP throughout the 1980s. She collaborated with and earned the respect of other activists, even the opposing force of hers in the queer rights movement, Randy Wicker.

Wicker had been one of the Mattachines, and one of the greatest proponents of the strategy that queer liberation could only come by convincing straight people that gay people were “just like them”. He was college-educated, wore a suit, and answered questions on television. This strategy was extremely popular at the time, especially by white gays and lesbians. This strategy also had no room for “distasteful” people.

I’ve been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask for your help and you all don’t do a goddamn thing for them. Have you ever been beaten up and raped and jailed?

Now think about it.

They’ve been beaten up and raped after they’ve had to spend much of their money in jail to get their [inaudible], and try to get their sex changes. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes or to become women. On the women’s liberation and they write ‘STAR,’ not to the women’s groups, they do not write women, they do not write men, they write ‘STAR’ because we’re trying to do something for them

I have been to jail. I have been raped. And beaten. Many times!

By men, heterosexual men that do not belong in the homosexual shelter. But, do you do anything for me? No. You tell me to go and hide my tail between my legs.

I will not put up with this shit. I have been beaten. I have had my nose broken. I have been thrown in jail. I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation and you all treat me this way? What the fuck’s wrong with you all?

Think about that!

I do not believe in a revolution, but you all do. I believe in the gay power. I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. That’s all I wanted to say to you people.

If you all want to know about the people in jail and do not forget Bambi L’amour, and Dora Mark, Kenny Metzner, and other gay people in jail, come and see the people at Star House on Twelfth Street on 640 East Twelfth Street between B and C apartment 14.

The people are trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women that belong to a white middle class white club. And that’s what you all belong to!

REVOLUTION NOW! Gimme a ‘G’! Gimme an ‘A’! Gimme a ‘Y’! Gimme a ‘P’! Gimme an ‘O’! Gimme a ‘W’! Gimme an ‘E! Gim me an ‘R’! [crying] Gay power! Louder! GAY POWER!

they moved back. Impossible to do. "Nobody's going to fuck around with me. I ain't going to take this shit," a guy in a dark red tee-shirt shouted, dancing in and out of the crowd.

Then they hauled a couple off into the van. It was hard to see or know what was happening inside. A few plainclothesmen were surveying the crowd, obviously panicked. As yet there was no support from the riot squad, though the longer the cops took, the hotter the crowd became.

They began shouting for different people that they knew were being held. "We want Tommy, the blond drag queen." shouts went up. Pennies ricocheted off the van, a beer can hit the door. Suddenly Tommy appeared in blond wig, etc. and walked coolly out the door. Shouts and screaming

"We want Tommy." Tommy, not held by the pigs, smiled and suddenly took off into the crowd to the left. The pigs were really flustered. Many went running after Tommy who took off in a taxi.

A couple more were thrown into the van. We joined in with some who wanted to storm the van, free those inside, then turn over the van. But nobody was yet prepared for that kind of action. Then a scuffle at the door.

One guy refused to be put into the van. 5 or 6 cops guarding the van tried to subdue him with little success. Several guys tried to help free him. Unguarded, 3 or 4 of those in the van appeared. then quickly disappeared into the crowd. This was all anyone needed.

Several others tried the resting the guy held by the cops, but the latter escaped into the Stonewall. Soon the van pulled out leaving the street unguarded. A few pigs outside had to flee for their lives inside and barricade themselves in. It was too good to be true. The crowd took the offensive.

The cat in the tee-shirt began by hurling a container of something at the door. Then a can or stone cracked a widow. Soon pandemonium broke loose. Cans, bottles, rocks, trashcans, finally a parking meter crashed the windows and door. Cheers went up. A sort of wooden wall blocking out the front plate glass windows was forced down. Then with the parking meter a ram, in went the door.

Marsha P Johnson was not part of the white club.

She was about as far from the acceptable class of queer as one could be.

She was a loud, black, mentally ill, homeless drag queen who refused to stay silent or to smother herself into "respectability".

Although she struggled with mental health issues, homelessness, and poverty throughout her life, she became known as "Saint Martha," the patron saint of young homeless queer people.

Reportedly she would give up anything and everything to help anyone who needed it.

She did not receive the same kindness; she remained destitute even as she was world-renowned. In 1992, Marsha told the world that she had been HIV+ since 1990.

On July 6th, 1992, at 46 years old, Marsha P Johnson's body was found in the Hudson River in New York City.

Without an investigation, police ruled her death a suicide.

"This last breakdown, I was fighting with everyone. I don't like getting in those fights, but when they say you can't stay and you don't know why… When I'm having a breakdown it seems like I meet all these weird people, all these strangers who don't understand gay people coming around. I know something is coming on and I light my candles and incense and pray to my saints. Sometimes I have visions. In one of them, there were 10 suns shining in the sky, gorgeous and freaked out, like the end of the world. I love my saints, darling, but sometimes the visions can be scary."

Marsha wasn't always a mythic figure, of course. She was once *redacted*, a church boy from Elizabeth, New Jersey. "I went every Sunday, honey, because I wanted to learn about Jesus. I always thought gayness was some sort of dream, something people talked about but never did. So I remained asexual for 17 years, until I left New Jersey and came to New York. It didn't look too gay, until I saw all these nellie things hustling near the Howard Johnson's at 6th Avenue and 8th Street." *redacted* soon put on a blond wig and became Marsha P. (for "Pay it no mind") Johnson.

"For the last 17 years," Marsha said, "my life has been built around sex and gay liberation, being a drag queen and dating all the time. It can get very boring you know, darling, all these men. Sometimes they hassle me if they thought I was a woman when they picked me up. I just say: 'Honey, this is like Macy's Department Store. If you like the merchandise, you take it. If you don't, I got to go.' I'd like to stop hustling and have a regular husband. It's easy to get a husband, but it's not easy to get them to, support me, or pay the bills, or give up sex. Because, honey, gay men don't give up sex for anything. My best husband — I met him dating — was a junkie and he got shot in a robbery. He wasn't a very good man, but he used to give me everything. I've had eight husbands and eight separations and none of them have given me a white house and picket fence."

Marsha's residence is spread out. "I've been 86ed from a lot of places — Ty's, Boots and Saddles, the Ramrod, the Silver Dollar, G.G. Knickerbockers, Keller's, the Limelight — so I spend most of my time on Christopher Street or under the West Side Highway." Marsha sleeps at the Beacon Baths ($7 a night), keeps her wardrobe in a Port Authority locker, makes up at department store sample counters (this morning it was Lord and Taylor, but the regular rotation includes Bloomingdale's, Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, B. Altman).

"I was in lots of raids before. All the street queens were. The paddy wagon was a regular routine. We used to sit in our little 42nd Street hotel rooms — 'hot spring hotels,' they used to call them — and party and get high and think about walking down the street somedays and not worry about getting busted by the police. That was a dream we all had, sitting in those hotel rooms or in the queens' tanks of the jails. So, honey, when it came that night, I was ready to tip a few cars for a dream. It was that year — 1969 — when I finally went out in the street in drag full-time. I just said, 'I don't give a shit,' and I've been in drag most of the time since."

As gay liberation changed from a resistance against police raids into a full-fledged movement, Marsha and fellow street transvestite Sylvia Rivera organized their people. Sylvia and Marsha knew each other from days of waiting tables at Child's Restaurant. They were a tough duo. The street transvestites became the vanguard of the movement: S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). By 1971, they had their own communal house on 15th Street. It had only four rooms, and the landlord had turned the electricity off, but it became a home for a floating population of 20 street queens, living by candlelight, sleeping everywhere, including the bathtub. Marsha became the mother of the S.T.A.R. house, and for a year and a half those four rooms were a warm respite from the streets.

It didn't last long. Nothing could stave off the problem of rent. By July 1971, the house had closed and the street transvestites lost favor in gay liberation. S.T.A.R. dispersed. Some overdosed, some were stabbed by johns. Sylvia Rivera retired to a domestic life upstate as a food preparer. Looking back, Marsha merely says, "You know how people are. They're very close at one time and after a while they just go away." Marsha is one the few who remained — a walking relic of a half-dead movement.

Marsha's position on Christopher Street is double-edged. A martyr of gay liberation, she is denied entrance to many bars. Andy Warhol silkscreens of Marsha sell for $1400 in a Christopher Street gallery while Marsha walks the sidewalk outside, broke.

Marsha "Pay It No Mind" Johnson struggled for most of her life with mental illness; being hospitalized multiple times. She struggled with violent outbursts, despite her overall personality being incredibly kind, generous and patient.

Her activism was vilified, often from within the queer community itself, for its revolutionary inclusion. She advocated for sex workers, prisoners, drug users, the homeless, the mentally ill, transgender people, and those living with HIV and AIDS.
She was vocally in favor of mutual aid, vocally anti-police, and revolutionarily honest about her chronic mental illness, homelessness, drug use, and sex work.

She, both in being and in speaking, utterly rejected the idea that the queer community ought to become more palatable, and that individuals seek to make themselves more digestible to society at large in order to deserve respect.

So now we sit, in 2021, and attempt to weigh the life and legacy of a beautiful, vulnerable, complex and flawed person. When seeing all the tributes, all the murals, the statues planned in NYC and Marsha's hometown, I am so struck with one overwhelming thought.

Where was all this money, this love, when she was here? The answer is devastating in its simplicity; it's not.

The current discourse about cops wanting to feel “included” in Pride is so beyond disrespectful to her and uncounted others who were literally abused, murdered and their legacies systematically destroyed by these same officers. Pride, as an event, only exists because of their resistance and struggle. Blood was shed. Lives were lost.

And those whose systemic abuses led to this event, this celebration of resistance and solidarity and vigil for the unknown masses of our ancestors whose stories we may never know, now dare to complain that they are not invited?

If we are to honor Marsha P Johnson and her legacy, in any way that matters, we will do it through radical honesty and revolutionary kindness. We will do it by protecting the most vulnerable of our community, and rejecting the myths of respectability politics. We will do it by being radically authentic and kind to the abused, not their abusers.

If you found this article helpful or informative, please consider donating to the Marsha P Johnson Institute, a charity that promotes the safety and wellbeing of black transgender people, especially those facing homelessness.

https://marshap.org/donate/

As Elle Hearns, the founder of the Marsha P Johnson Institute has said, *“I don’t think Marsha has left anything behind besides the permission of us all to be free.”*

For the last decade they let us die in droves and still we thank President Bush for planting a fucking tree, applaud him for likening PWAs to car accident victims who refuse to wear seatbelts.

Let yourself be angry.

Let yourself be angry that the price for visibility is the constant threat of violence, anti-queer violence to which practically every segment of this society contributes.

Let yourself feel angry that there is no place in this country where we are safe, no place where we are not targeted for hatred and attack, the self-hatred, the suicide - of the closet.

The next time some straight person comes down on you for being angry, tell them that until things change, you don't need any more evidence that the world turns at your expense.

You don't need to see only hetero couple grocery shopping on your TV ...

You don't want any more baby pictures shoved in your face until you can have or keep your own.

No more weddings, showers, anniversaries, please, unless they are our own brothers and sisters celebrating.

And tell them not to dismiss you by saying "You have rights," "You have privileges," "You are overreacting," or "You have a victim's mentality."

Tell them "Go away from me, until you change."

Go away and try on a world without the brave, strong queers that are its backbone, that are its guts and brains and souls.

Go tell them go away until they have spent a month walking hand in hand in public with someone of the same sex.

After they survive that, then you'll hear what they have to say about queer anger. Otherwise, tell them to shut up and listen.

Don't be fooled, straight people own the world and the only reason you have been spared is you're smart, lucky, or a fighter.

Straight people have a privilege that allows them to do whatever they please and fuck without fear. But not only do they live a life free of fears; they flaunt their freedom in my face. Their images are on my TV, in the magazine I bought, in the restaurant I want to eat in, and on the street where I live.

I want there to be a moratorium on straight marriage, on babies, on public displays of affection among the opposite sex and media images that promote heterosexuality. Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality, as straights, their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers.

Straight people will not do this voluntarily and so they must be forced into it. Straights must be frightened into it. Terrorized into it. Fear is the most powerful motivator. No one will give us what we deserve. Rights are not given they are taken, by force if necessary.

It is easier to fight when you know who your enemy is. Straight people are you enemy. They are your enemy when they don't acknowledge your invisibility and continue to live in and contribute to a culture that kills you.

Every day one of us is taken by the enemy. Whether it is an AIDS death due to homophobic government inaction or a lesbian bashing in an all-night diner (in a supposedly lesbian neighborhood), we are being systematically picked off and we will continue to be wiped out unless we realize that if they take one of us they must take all of us.

I Hate Straights

I have friends. Some of them are straight.

Year after year, I see my straight friends. I want to see them, to see how they are doing, to add newness to our long and complicated histories, to experience some continuity.

Year after year I continue to realize that the facts of my life are irrelevant to them and that I am only half listened to, that I am an appendage to the doings of a greater world, a world of power and privilege, of the laws of installation, a world of exclusion.

"That's not true," argue my straight friends. There is the one certainty in the politics of power: those left out of it beg for inclusion, while the insiders claim that they already are. Men do it to women, whites do it to blacks, and everyone does it to queers.

The main dividing line, both conscious and unconscious, is procreation . .. and that magic word - Family. Frequently, the ones we are born into disown us when they find out who we really are, and to make matters worse, we are prevented from having our own.
We are punished, insulted, cut off, and treated like seditionaries in terms of child rearing, both damned if we try and damned if we abstain. It's as if the propagation of the species is such a fragile directive that without enforcing it as if it were an agenda, humankind would melt back into the primeval ooze.

I hate having to convince straight people that lesbians and gays live in a war zone, that we're surrounded by bomb blasts only we seem to hear, that our bodies and souls are heaped high, dead from fright or bashed or raped, dying of grief or disease, stripped of our personhood.

I hate straight people who can't listen to queer anger without saying "hey, all straight people aren't like that. I'm straight too, you know," as if their egos don't get enough stroking or protection in this arrogant, heterosexist world. Why must we take care of them, in the midst of our just anger brought on by their fucked up society?! Why add the reassurance of "Of course, I don't mean you. You don't act that way." Let them figure out for themselves whether they deserve to be included in our anger.

I'm Angry

The strong sisters told the brothers that there were two important things to remember about the coming revolutions. The first is that we will get our asses kicked. The second is that we will win.

I'm angry.

I'm angry for being condemned to death by strangers saying, "You deserve to die" and "AIDS is the cure."

Fury erupts when a Republican woman wearing thousands of dollars of garments and jewelry minces by the police lines shaking her head, chuckling and wagging her finger at us like we are recalcitrant children making absurd demands and throwing a temper tantrum when they aren't met.

Angry while Joseph agonizes over $8,000 a year for AZT which might keep him alive a little longer and which does make him sicker than the disease he is diagnosed with.

Angry as I listen to a man tell me that after changing his will five times he's running out of people to leave things to. All of his best friends are dead.

Angry when I stand in a sea of quilt panels, or go to a candlelight march or attend yet another memorial service. I will not march silently with a fucking candle and I want to take that goddamned quilt and wrap myself in it and furiously rent it and my hair and curse every god religion ever created.

I refuse to accept a creation that cuts people down in the third decade of their life. It is cruel and vile and meaningless and everything I have in me rails against the absurdity and I raise my face to the clouds and a ragged laugh that sounds more demonic than joyous erupts from my throat and tears stream down my face and if this disease doesn't kill me, I may just die of frustration.

Rules of Conduct for Straight People:

1. Keep your displays of affection (kissing, handholding, embracing) to a minimum. Your sexuality is unwanted and offensive to many here.

2. If you must slow dance, be an inconspicuous as possible.

3. Do not gawk or stare at lesbians or gay men, especially bull dykes or drag queens. We are not your entertainment.

4. If you cannot comfortably deal with someone of the same sex making a pass at you, get out.

5. Do not flaunt your heterosexuality. Be discreet. Risk being mistaken for a lezzie or a homo.

6. If you feel these rules are unfair, go fight homophobia in straight clubs, or

7. Go fuck Yourself.

untitled

Since time began, the world has been inspired by the work of queer artists. In exchange, there has been suffering, there has been pain, there has been violence.

Throughout history, society has struck a bargain with its queer citizens: they must pursue creative careers, if they do so discreetly.

Through the arts queers are productive, lucrative, entertaining and even uplifting. These are the clear-cut and useful by-products of what is otherwise considered anti-social behavior. In cultured circles, queers may quietly coexist with an otherwise disapproving power elite.

At the forefront of the most recent campaign to bash queer artists is Jesse Helms, arbiter of all that is decent, moral, christian and amerikan. For Helms, queer art is quite simply a threat to the world.

In his imaginings, heterosexual culture is too fragile to bear up to the admission of human or sexual diversity. Quite simply, the structure of power in the Judeo-Christian world has made procreation its cornerstone.

Families having children assures consumers for the nation's products and a work force to produce them, as well as a built-in family system to care for its ill, reducing the expense of public healthcare systems.

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Families having children assures consumers for the nation's products and a work force to produce them, as well as a built-in family system to care for its ill, reducing the expense of public healthcare systems.

All non-procreative behavior is considered a threat, from homosexuality to birth control to abortion as an option.

Why Queer?

Queer!

Ah, do we really have to use that word? It's trouble. Every gay person has his or her own take on it. For some it means strange and eccentric and kind of mysterious. That's okay; we like that. But some gay girls and boys don't. They think they're more normal than strange.

And for others "queer" conjures up those awful memories of adolescent suffering. Queer. It's forcibly bittersweet and quaint at best - weakening and painful at worst. Couldn't we just use "gay" instead? It's a much brighter word. And isn't it synonymous with "happy"? When will you militants grow up and get over the novelty of being different?

Why Queer ...

Well, yes, "gay" is great. It has its place. But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay. So we've chosen to call ourselves queer.

Using "queer" is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It's a way of telling ourselves we don't have to be witty and charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized in the straight world. We use queer as gay men loving lesbians and lesbians loving being queer. Queer, unlike gay, doesn't mean male.

And when spoken to other gays and lesbians it's a way of suggesting we close ranks, and forget (temporarily) our individual differences because we face a more insidious common enemy. Yeah, queer can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe's hands and use against him.

If You're Queer, Shout It!

Queers are under siege.

Queers are being attacked on all fronts and I'm afraid it's ok with us. In 1969, Queers, were attacked. It wasn't ok. Queers fought back, took the streets.

Shouted

In 1990, there were 50 "Queer Bashings" in the month of May alone.

Violent attacks. 3,720 men, women and children died of AIDS in the same month, caused by a more violent attack - government inaction, rooted in society's growing homophobia.

This is institutionalized homophobia, perhaps more dangerous to the existence of queers because the attackers are faceless. We allow these attacks by our own continued lack of action against them.

AIDS has affected the straight world and now they're blaming us for AIDS and using it as a way to justify their violence against us. They don't want us anymore.

They will beat us, rape us and kill us before they will continue to live with us. What will it take for This not to be ok? Feel some rage. If rage doesn't empower you, try fear. If that doesn't work try panic.

Shout it!

Be proud. Do whatever you need to do to tear yourself away from your customary state of acceptance. Be free. Shout.

In 1969, Queers fought back. In 1990, Queers say ok.

Next year, will we be here?

untitled

When anyone assaults you for being queer, it is queer bashing. Right?

A crowd of 50 people exit a gay bar as it closes. Across the street, some straight boys are shouting "Faggots" and throwing beer bottles at the gathering, which outnumbers them by 10 to 1. Three queers make a move to respond, getting no support from the group. Why did a group this size allow themselves to be sitting ducks?

Tompkins Square Park, Labor Day. At an annual outdoor concert/drag show, a group of gay men were harassed by teens carrying sticks. In the midst of thousands of gay men and lesbians, these straight boys beat two gay men to the ground, then stood around triumphantly laughing amongst themselves. The emcee was alerted and warned the crowd from the stage, "You girls be careful. When you dress up it drives the boys crazy," as if it were a practical joke inspired by what the victims were wearing rather than a pointed attack on anyone and everyone at that event.

What would it have taken for that crowd to stand up to its attackers?

After James Zappalorti, an openly gay man, was murdered in cold blood on Staten Island this winter, a single demonstration was held in protest. Only one hundred people came. When Yusef Hawkins, a black youth, was shot to death for being on "White turf" in Bensonhurst, African Americans marched through that neighborhood in large numbers again and again.

A black person was killed because he was black, and people of color throughout the city recognized it and acted on it. The bullet that hit Hawkins was meant for a black man, any black man. Do most gays and lesbians think that the knife that punctured Zappalorti's heart was meant only for him?

The straight world has us so convinced that we are helpless and deserving victims of the violence against us, that queers are immobilized when faced with a threat. Be outraged! These attacks must not be tolerated. Do something. Recognize that any act of aggression against any member of our community is an attack on every member of the community.

Where Are You Sisters?

Invisibility is Our Responsibility

I wear my pink triangle everywhere. I do not lower my voice in public when talking about lesbian love or sex. I always tell people I'm a lesbian. I don't wait to be asked about my "boyfriend." I don't say it's "no one's business."

I don't do this for straight people. Most of them don't know what the pink triangle even means. Most of them couldn't care less that my girlfriend and I are totally in love or having a fight on the street. Most of them don't notice us no matter what we do. I do what I do to reach other lesbians.

I do what I do because I don't want lesbians to assume I'm a straight girl. I am out all the time, everywhere, because I want to reach you. Maybe you'll notice me, maybe start talking, maybe we'll become friends. Maybe we won't say a word but our eyes will meet and I will imagine you naked, sweating, openmouthed, your back arched as I am fucking you. And we'll be happy to know we aren't the only ones in the world. We'll be happy because we found each other, without saying a word, maybe just for a moment.

But no.

You won't wear a pink triangle on that linen lapel. You won't meet my eyes if I flirt with you on the street. You avoid me on the job because I'm "too" out. You chastise me in bars because I'm "too political." You ignore me in public because I bring "too much" attention to "my" lesbianism. But then you want me to be your lover, you want me to be your friend, you want me to love you, support you, fight for "our" right to exist.

Where Are You?

You talk, talk, talk about invisibility and then retreat to your homes to nest with your lovers or carouse in a bar with pals and stumble home in a cab or sit silently and politely by while your family, your boss, your neighbors, your public servants distort and disfigure us, deride us and punish us. Then home again and you feel like screaming. Then you pad your anger with a relationship or a career or a party with other dykes like you and still you wonder why we can't find each other, why you feel lonely, angry, alienated.